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# SNOOPING ON THE SPOOKS

## Covert Action Information Bulletin

by Marc Cooper

**T**he Covert Action Information Bulletin is perhaps one of the most important little magazines in the country. It comes out only two or three, sometimes four times a year. It's well laid-out but has no color and virtually no advertising. Its circulation is well under 10,000. Its name is rarely mentioned on the news, and other reporters make a point of not attributing it as their source. But it has so frightened the CIA that the agency persuaded Congress to virtually outlaw the magazine. The new law had the opposite effect. Today, Covert Action Information Bulletin's circulation is larger than ever before, in spite of the Agent Identities Protection Act, which was intended to knock the publication out of existence.

The goal of the magazine is simple: to relentlessly expose the activities of the CIA, its affiliated organizations and its operatives. Started just five years ago in the apartment of its editors, The Bulletin now occupies modest offices in Washington D.C.'s National Press Building. Not a day goes by in which one or more major news organizations doesn't call The Bulletin to get the "real story" on this or that suspected operation or individual. And hardly ever does the magazine get its due credit for helping out the megabuck-backed Big Media that so often relies on its help.

Two of the magazine's three editors, attorney William Schaap and writer Ellen Ray, were recently in Los Angeles. They spoke with the Weekly's Marc Cooper.

**Weekly:** The most recent issue of your magazine disputes the Reagan administration claim that the U.S. had no intelligence operatives in Grenada before the time of the invasion. Do you continue to stand by that claim?

**Schaap:** Absolutely. It's enough to just look at some of the statements from the new interim government. We know for a fact that there were many CIA agents on Grenada for a long time prior to the invasion. Newsweek reported that one of the agents worked at the medical school. The New York Times ran a piece on a secret meeting between CIA Director William Casey and a group of senators, in which Casey confirmed that a large number of the CIA agents on the island were removed during the flights that returned the medical students to the United States.

Not only had the administration always advertised its desire to get rid of the Grenadian government, but in addition it is a country that is very easy to infiltrate. There were a number of retired Americans living there. There were a thousand students at the medical school.

**Weekly:** Do you think there may have been some agents among the students?

**Ray:** We know so! In the Newsweek article we mentioned one agent is named — Jim Pfeister. And older medical students told the other students that he had been a U.S. consul in Laos during the Vietnam War but had tired of the State Department and wanted to learn a new profession. But when the invasion happened the students saw Pfeister using a walkie-talkie to actually direct the American troops.

**Weekly:** Is there any information to indicate CIA involvement in the events prior

to the coup in Grenada, or can we assume that the fall of the Bishop government was strictly an internal division?

**Ray:** No, it's more complicated. In fact, we have so far determined that Vice President George Bush was in the Barbados the day after Bishop was killed. He was meeting personally with Prime Minister Tom Adams. It may be Bush was there before, but we cannot yet document that. But at that time Adams was already telling reporters that Bush had proposed a so-called rescue mission for Bishop, who had been under house arrest.

**Schaap:** It seems very clear that the U.S. and the CIA wanted Bishop killed. One of the things we learned by studying Grenada is that the four years of U.S. destabilization attempts had not worked. From Carter through Reagan they had tried everything: economic pressure, media campaigns, violent attacks, bombings — but nothing had worked. It is clear that in the early days of the Reagan administration it was decided to work toward the direct overthrow of the government. They had to invent an excuse that would justify an invasion, and, of course, it also meant that Bishop would have to be killed. We know that the CIA had agents infiltrated into the upper levels of the Grenadian Army and the ruling New Jewel Movement.

**Weekly:** How can you be certain of that?

**Ray:** I think a reading of the New Jewel Central Committee documents seized by the Pentagon will show that. Of course, of

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the two tons of papers captured, they have only released about five pounds. And some of those look forged! But the Central Committee documents look real. And for those who know all of the principals personally, it comes as quite a shock to see how Bishop was pushed and confronted. But the performance of some of the other Central Committee members was strange. One of them, for example, was never arrested or brought to the USS Guam as the rest were. And later he was even broadcasting from a U.S. helicopter, telling the Grenadian Army to lay down their arms.

There are also some heretofore unrevealed aspects of Bishop's killing. We reported in the last issue of our magazine that the majority of the crowd that came to free Bishop from house arrest were actually right-wingers. We know that the Coca-Cola bottling company let its workers off the job to go participate in the demonstration. Some of Bishop's people, like Einstein Lewison, warned him not to go with the group that had freed him. But Bishop reportedly said he believed he could keep the group in control and that all he wanted to do was to get to the town square. He went in a car that was waiting for him because he was told he was going to be taken to the hospital. But instead it drove him right to the military base at Fort Rupert. It seems that Bishop and his people were at the fort for an hour or two. Then there were two huge explosions. What we deduce is that from the crowd of supposed Bishop supporters two grenades were thrown at some of the army's armored cars, which in turn provoked the killings, including the death of Bishop.

**Schaap:** There were concrete preparations underway for the invasion even before Bishop was killed. The Army Rangers had been practicing airport takeovers for a full two weeks before the takeover occurred. We know that from interviews with GI's from Fort Lewis, interviews that appeared in Washington state newspapers. This is separate from the 1981 military exercises conducted around Vieques Island in Puerto Rico. During this invasion practice the target was called Amber, and it was allegedly threatening the Amberines. Not too different from Grenada and the Grenadines! The supposition was that a hostile Communist government was holding hostages and that its airport and capital had to be seized by U.S. and allied troops.

**Weekly:** In general terms, has the Reagan administration "unleashed" the intelligence agencies to the degree that some feared when it took office?

**Schaap:** The changes made by the current administration have been more than significant, quantitatively and qualitatively. There is a big difference between the emotional and ideological emphasis given by Reagan and that of the preceding administration. Reagan has gone for and ob-

tained things that even Nixon never dreamed of getting. They got the Agent Identities Intelligence Act passed. They got the executive order on Intelligence Activities allowing domestic CIA operations and infiltration.

**Weekly:** What is so different about this executive order?

**Schaap:** This order, number 12333, is supposed to be an overall guideline for intelligence activities. But more than anything it authorizes a new range of covert operations and has the effect of altering the CIA's charter. That charter says the agency is not allowed to engage in any internal police or security functions. But this new order allows the CIA to infiltrate and manipulate domestic organizations if it is supposedly helpful for foreign intelligence-gathering activities. It also allows the FBI and the CIA to increasingly ignore the Fourth Amendment and its provisions requiring warrants.

**Ray:** The interpretation of what constitutes foreign intelligence-gathering is so broad that this order makes vulnerable nearly anyone who is merely interested in or involved in issues of foreign affairs. A number of groups have challenged this order in the courts, including the United Presbyterian Church, which has in the past been a target of infiltration.

**Weekly:** Wouldn't the use of the Freedom of Information Act make it possible to discover where the CIA is engaged in domestic spying?

**Schaap:** Not really. Right now the CIA is proposing a rule that would exempt its "operational files" from the FOIA. What civil libertarians fear is that again, the interpretation of what those files are will be so broad that it will act as a blanket exemption for the CIA. This is a proposal that stands before Congress as an amendment to the FOIA. And it looks like it will pass, thanks in part to the ACLU.

**Weekly:** That sounds strange. Why would the ACLU support a restriction on civil liberties?

**Ray:** Well, it's the lesser-of-two-evils strategy. The national ACLU did the same with the Agent Identities Act. They supported one version of it, arguing that if they didn't, the even more restrictive version would pass. They now say the same about the amendments to the FOIA.

**Weekly:** Certainly, the Agent Identities Act is the most important accomplishment of the Reagan administration's intelligence agenda. Many people say the act was designed specifically to put your magazine out of business. Is that the case?

**Ray:** Certainly. But it really all started under the Carter administration. One day we got a call from an NBC television producer. He said he had just been to CIA headquarters and there he was told that the agency's biggest enemy was not the Soviet Union or the KGB, but was rather the *Covert Action Information Bulletin*! NBC decided to do a segment on us. And

when we saw the finished product, we saw they also interviewed then-CIA director Stansfield Turner and his deputy, Frank Carlucci. In that segment, Admiral Turner called us traitors, and Carlucci, for the first time, made public the proposed Agent Identities Act. More significantly, Carlucci even said he knew there would be some problems with the First Amendment. But the next day the press was dead silent on the issue.

**Schaap:** There are three sections to the act, and one of those is what I call the truly outrageous part. It prohibits the identification of undercover operatives of any kind by former government employees who have access to the information, by former government employees who may not have had specific access to the information but because of their expertise learned how to identify the agents, and by anybody else, no matter what their source of information. This in fact criminalizes the publication of information that has been gotten from the public domain. So, for example, if a French paper publishes a story saying that Mr. X is an agent, and if *The New York Times* then reports that the French paper said that X was an operative, the *Times* has committed a felony.

**Weekly:** This act is really designed, very specifically, to stop the naming of names.

**Schaap:** Yes. But it goes further. It also applies to you, as an individual, telling another individual what you have found out about an agent. And not just CIA agents. It also applies to officers, employees, informants and sources of operational assistance. That means that if you are in a group that is infiltrated by the CIA, and if one day you see the CIA agent sitting in a car giving his information to a case officer, it means that you have just "named" his identity. Under this act it would be illegal for you to go back to your

group and tell of what you have learned. You will have committed a felony by divulging a source of operational assistance to unauthorized persons.

**Weekly:** Did the act hurt you like the government intended?

**Schaap:** Not really. All it has meant is that we discontinued one column that we used to call "Naming Names." Otherwise our subscriptions and sales went up, probably because of the publicity that came from hearing that Congress had passed a law against our magazine.

**Weekly:** Why do you think it is so important to expose the identities and activities of CIA agents?

**Schaap:** It's mostly important to those foreign individuals and groups that have been targeted for subversion by the CIA. Look, the agency's main job around the world is to turn the citizens of a given country into simple traitors. The CIA calls

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it recruiting agents. We call it asking people to become informers against their own government. The way the CIA gets its foot in the door is by appearing to be something it isn't. By working through labor advisers, diplomatic attaches, students, businessmen and so on.

**Weekly:** *Are you bothered by charges that your work plays into the hands of, say, the KGB?*

**Schaap:** Even the CIA admits that the other intelligence services all know who these agents are. The CIA knows the KGB and the KGB knows all the company people. Not to mention the British, the French and the Israelis. They all know who each other are. In fact, most of them are part of an Old Boys network and probably all go out to lunch together. But it's the people, the civilians, who have no idea what's going on behind their backs.

**Ray:** And in this country it is our First Amendment right to know what is happening and who the agents are.

**Weekly:** *Isn't it necessary for a country like the United States to maintain an effective CIA?*

**Schaap:** Only if you are talking about real intelligence-gathering. We have never had any problem with that idea. But what the CIA does is interfere with the affairs of other countries. It's one thing to want to

know what a certain country is doing. It's another to directly interfere with it and try to change it and shape it to your needs. Take a simple case like Italy. Every government in that country since World War II has been dominated by the pro-Washington Christian Democrats. And it turns out that the CIA has been funding that party's electoral campaigns on an ongoing basis since 1947. The CIA was trying to guarantee that Italy would have the government we wanted, not the ones the Italians necessarily wanted. Maybe the Italians would have voted for the Christian Democrats anyway. But we'll never know.

Why should the U.S. take it upon itself to decide which governments stand and which fall? And this argument about national security doesn't hold up. Only a chimpanzee would argue that Grenada — with a population of 100,000 — posed a threat to our national security. ■

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